D975

SOUTH AFRICA

Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerke
van die Kaap, Natal en Transvaal

Dutch Reformed Church
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

NO. 42. 119, De Korte Street, Johannesburg. Union of South Africa. **MAY, 1961**

WITHDRAWAL FROM WORLD COUNCIL

The Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk of the Transvaal has withdrawn from the World Council of Churches. This decision was taken by the General Synod by an overwhelming majority at its meeting in Pretoria last month. The church will, however, remain in correspondence with the World Council in order to receive its publications.

The resolution stated: "In view of the report of the *ad hoc* committee, from which it is clear that there are many misgivings about the World Council of Churches, and for the sake of the long-cherished ideal of church union (of the five federated Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerke), the attainment of which is already in sight but is in danger of being jeopardised by our church's membership of the World Council of Churches, the synod resolves to terminate the said membership forthwith". The Committee for Current Affairs was instructed to make a thorough study of the concept of ecumenicity.

The resolution was passed after a very short debate. Only one speech was made in favour of withdrawal and one speech against the proposal. It can be assumed, however, that the delegates were influenced by three main considerations.

Firstly, objections against W.C.C. membership have been raised from time to time and at previous synod meetings there was considerable division of opinion on the issue. The objections were similar to those voiced in some church circles in other countries, and were so strong that only two of the five federated Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerke could be persuaded to join the council.

Secondly, the decision was influenced by the outcome of the recent consultation of South African member churches of the World Council of Churches. The statement issued by the consultation was strongly criticised in D.R.C. circles, as already indicated in previous issues of this Newsletter. Many church councils and members called for withdrawal from the council.

The final consideration was the fact that the three Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerke who were not members of the W.C.C., strongly objected against entering into a union with churches who did belong to the council. It is most unlikely that, under these circumstances,

the united church would have joined the council. The W.C.C. membership of the Cape and Transvaal churches would then probably have lapsed automatically, as these churches will no longer be autonomous bodies. At its meeting in Cape Town in March, the Federal Council of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerke also strongly urged the Cape and Transvaal churches to terminate their W.C.C. membership.

The Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk too, has withdrawn from the World Council of Churches. The Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk of the Transvaal will remain a member of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (World Presbyterian Alliance) and the Reformed Ecumenical Synod.

CONFERENCE STATEMENT DEBATED

The General Synod of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk of the Transvaal at its meeting in Pretoria last month expressed its regret at the adoption and publication of such far-reaching resolutions as those passed by the recent conference of South African member churches of the World Council of Churches, before a competent church body had had an opportunity of considering them. The synod stated that "all resolutions conflicting with our church's formulated policy are unacceptable to this meeting", and disapproved of the manner in which government policy was criticised by the conference.

The synod reaffirmed that the church had accepted it as part of its calling to promote the highest interests of the non-white population groups as well, and expressed the conviction that this could best be done according to the historical policy of differentiation. Members of the church were urged to maintain a Christian attitude toward the non-whites in all spheres.

While disapproving of the conference resolutions in general, the synod accepted the good faith and integrity of its representatives who had subscribed to the resolutions. The Committee for Current Affairs was instructed to give consideration to the resolutions which required further study.

The decision was passed by the synod at the end of a debate lasting two days. Six of the church's delegates to the W.C.C. conference took part in the debate.

A week earlier, the Federal Council of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerke had also decided that although some of the conference resolutions were not unacceptable if differently framed, the council could not identify itself with the findings.

ENGLISH CONGREGATIONS CONSIDERED

The Natal synod of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk is prepared to give earnest consideration to the possibility of establishing congregations for English-speaking people in Durban, Pietermaritzburg and elsewhere as soon as the need for such congregations can be ascertained.

A resolution to this effect was passed unanimously by the synod at its meeting in Pietermaritzburg last month. The subject was broached by way of a resolution from the church council of Durban West, and telegrams in support of the proposal were received from several groups and individuals.

One telegram, signed by English-speaking Christians of Durban, read: "May we plead to the synod for a long felt need in the immediate establishment of an English congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church. We feel that you preach in every other language in South Africa except that of your greatest allies, the other half of the white population . . . We look to you for leadership and pray for a favourable decision."

From time to time the possiblity of forming English congregations has been raised at church meetings. At the recent meeting of the Federal Council it was decided, however, that the establishment of separate English D.R. Churches could not be recommended. Natal congregations will probably try to assess the need for English congregations by arranging regular services in English in certain centres in the near future.

CHURCH UNION APPROVED

The draft church order, providing for an organic union of the five federated Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerke, has now been approved by four of the five synods concerned.

The Transvaal and Natal synods decided almost simultaneously last month to accept the church order as a basis for church union. In both cases the resolution was passed unanimously. The Orange Free State synod and the South-West Africa synod had earlier taken similar decisions, and the Cape synod is expected to follow suit at its meeting in October.

The first meeting of the General Synod of the united church will probably take place in Cape Town some time next year. The synod will consist of 450 members. That historic meeting will be held exactly a century after the various provincial churches were forced apart as a result of a decision of the old Cape Supreme Court.

The court ruling was based upon Ordinance No. 7 of 1843, which was repealed by the South African Parliament a few weeks ago. The ordinance was introduced in the previous century "to free it (the church) from the trammels of secular intereference in all spiritual or purely ecclesiastical matters", but it also imposed limitations which caused difficulties from time to time. The ordinance was provisionally repealed by parliament in 1911, but the act was never promulgated as the proposed merger at that time failed to get the required support from church congregations.

OPPORTUNITY FOR SELF-EXAMINATION

"The fact that the church must guard against encroaching on the domain of the state, does not absolve it from the duty to test the actions of the state to the Word of God", said the Rev. Dr. A. J. van

der Merwe in his opening address at the recent meeting of the Federal Council of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerke in Cape Town.

Dr. Van der Merwe said it was necessary in these times to reassess the task of the church in relation to current problems. Probably never before had the attention of the whole world been focused on the continent of Africa as it was today. Political drama of a magnitude never before known was developing with devastating speed in the northern end of the continent. Demands were made for full autonomy for the black man without regard to whether or not he possessed the qualifications to use this power both for his own good and for that of the whites.

When the white man, as in the Congo, became the victim of the anarchy which was a natural result of political and cultural immaturity, we could wait in vain for a flood of condemnation from that world opinion which in recent years had been so eloquent about human rights.

It was to be expected that the explosions of awakening black nationalism would also have their effect in South Africa. The tidal wave of unrest had already reached us. "We must ask ourselves in all honesty and soberness whether this is not perhaps an opportunity that God gives us for self-examination," he continued.

In the past the Afrikaners had faced immense setbacks and dark days, but in all those times there had been one thing in their favour: "We, as a small nation, had the respect, admiration and very often the sympathy and good wishes of world opinion on our side. Today, however, we are faced with the fact that world opinion, even in friendly and associated countries, has turned against us with a severity and bitterness which often borders on hysteria."

"Are we prepared in these times of crisis to listen again, and see whether God has something to say to us in regard to these happenings? Must we not, more than ever before, let the light of God's Word fall on the problems we struggle with, with a view to our own safety as well as our moral obligations towards others?" he asked. More than ever before the church had the responsibility of undertaking its prophetic task with courage, faith and daring.

Dr. Van der Merwe stated that the church had to guard against the impression that national existence as such was an end in itself. Afrikanership as such could not be regarded as a conclusive claim to the continued protection of the Almighty. As far as the coloured races were concerned, he could not see it as the task of the church to reject outright, or treat unsympathetically, the urge for greater say and independence. Christianity could function equally well in the framework of many political systems, but there was one clear condition attached — whatever the polical system, it must be the same for all groups.

Published by the Information Bureaux of the Dutch Reformed Churches, 119, De Korte Street, Johannesburg (Tel. 44-2037) and P.O. Box 144, Cape Town (Tel. 2-2595). Printed by Voortrekkerpers Beperk, Johannesburg.